

Farmers' Market Advisory Council

Monday, December 22, 2008
5:00 pm

Nick's English Hut

Advisory Council Members Present

Teresa Birtles, Linda Chapman, Mandy Corry, Beth Hollingsworth, Bruce McCallister, Gregg "Rags" Rago and Ron Stephenson.

Market Staff

Marcia Veldman and Bradley Drake.

Public

None present

1. Call to Order

Bruce called the meeting to order.

2. Approval of Minutes

Ron moved to approve the September minutes, Linda seconded and Bruce approved.

3. Public Comment

None

4. New Business

(A) Review Customer and Vendor Survey Results

Marcia provided the Council with copies of the customer and vendor survey results, as well as copies of an article about enforcing market rules at the Greenmarkets in NY and 2009 Advisory Council meeting schedules.

Marcia noted that only 2 vendor surveys were returned to her, which she felt indicated vendors were generally satisfied with the Market. She also said that based on the surveys, overall it seemed customers were very pleased with their experience at the Market. Linda thought there might be a greater response from vendors if they were sent out later in the year, maybe in the off-season when the vendors have more free time. Marcia agreed there may be a greater response if the surveys were sent out later, but added that it wouldn't work to send them out much later, because the feedback needs to be taken in to consideration well before the end of the year in order to implement any changes for the coming season. Rags suggested the reason there is such a low return in vendor surveys may be because vendors feel comfortable communicating directly with Marcia and Bradley when they have questions or concerns. Marcia and Bradley both mentioned that vendors do regularly communicate with them on issues that arise throughout the season.

Bruce suggested the possibility of Advisory Council members handing out the vendor surveys in 2009 (rather than send them out in a Market Beet) as a way to give the vendors and Council members an opportunity to connect and hopefully solicit a greater response. Everyone liked the idea and Marcia said she would connect with the Council when it was time to start collecting surveys.

Teresa noted the significant number of positive customer comments regarding the PFV Brown County Coffee Roasters. Marcia added that based on their sales records they were the best selling PFV at Market in 2008.

Rags noted several customer comments about needing more bike racks around Market and asked about the possibility of more being added near the B-Line. Marcia said that unfortunately there will only be a limited number of bike racks added near the B-Line, but that she was working with Park Operations to identify other locations around Market where more could be added. She and Bradley both agreed that there is a need for more bike racks in general and that need will probably increase once the B-Line is in use.

Rags also noted customer comments regarding the need for more seating space around Market. He mentioned that adding more seating areas could encourage more folks to take advantage of the PFV's offerings and stay at Market a bit longer to enjoy a meal. Marcia said there will be additional seating near the B-Line, including: a limestone seating wall a couple hundred feet long separating Market and the B-Line, additional limestone seating blocks and traditional benches around the B-Line.

Marcia also said there would be an additional limestone seating block area set up adjacent to Market designed as a tribute to vendors of Market's past. The Council suggested hosting a dedication event at Market in April. Marcia liked the idea and said she would follow up.

(B) Update on Park Board Retreat

Marcia said that the Park Board retreat went very well. While she generally brought the Board up to speed on all the details of the Market's growth in recent years, there were several significant developments she specifically wanted to share with the Council.

First, she discussed the Board's decision to terminate Ernie Biltz's contract for the 2008 season, but allowing him to reapply in 2009. Given the nature of Ernie's situation Marcia suggested to the Board that there should be some additional rules Ernie must follow in order for his application to be valid, these include:

- Ernie would not be allowed to sell any peaches from the section of orchard he purchased from Pete Slowick in Daviess County;

- If he plans to sell peaches from his property in Worthington, he would have to include a listing of all the trees planted including number, age and typical harvest dates of each variety;

- He will be expected to keep records related to the growing, harvesting and selling of all produce and provide them for review, if requested, by an established date;

- If he intends on reserving a space, his application would be due the first week of March, allowing time for review or if he planned on selling as a day stall vendor he would have to submit his application 14 days in advance of the day he intended on selling;

- He would understand that the City has the right to do an unannounced farm inspection at any time during the season;

- And that if records are found to be inadequate and Market Staff determine there is a reasonable likelihood that he breached the contract, his contract would be terminated immediately.

She suggested that a letter be sent (certified mail) to Ernie in January informing him of what would be expected of him if he chose to apply. Marcia said the Board supported this action and the Council agreed that it was fair. Linda said she spoke with Ernie and his intention was to reserve a space in 2009. Marcia asked for the Council's formal support in sending the letter to Ernie. Ron moved in support of the letter, Linda seconded and all Council members present voted in approval.

Second, in light of the recent changes in State law allowing for wineries to sell an unlimited number of times at farmer's markets through the year, Marcia proposed to the Board the possibility of opening up PFV to allow for wine vendors, with preference given to wineries that produce wine in Monroe County from grapes grown by them. The Board supported making this addition to PFV.

Finally, when Marcia was reviewing the proposed Market site changes for 2009 to utilize additional space which will be created with the opening of the B-Line, the Board expressed concern about the plan to move the PFV's to the new plaza connecting the B-Line to Market. They thought it may create too much demand on that space, not knowing exactly how people will use it. They thought it would be better to wait until the B-Line is open and pedestrian traffic could be assessed before making the move. Marcia told the Board that it would be best to know where the PFVs will be located well before the Market opens as there are several important infrastructure needs for PFVs, including electricity and water, which would need to be taken in to consideration well in advance. They did like the idea of consolidating all the prepared food vendors in to one area and suggested the possibility of closing down a portion of Morton St. to provide space for the PFVs as an alternative. After some discussion Marcia and the Board decided it would make sense to work out which area of Morton would work best and then seek Public Works approval to close it down during Market so it might at least be an option, and then really look at the two possibilities more thoroughly.

Marcia did get approval from Public Works to close down the Morton St. just north of 8th St. going east to just south of the Smallwood parking garage entrance, but after seeking input from the 2008 PFVs (who all preferred moving to the plaza) and careful consideration she and Bradley decided it would work best to have the PFVs located on the B-Line plaza in 2009 with the option of moving them if it is found to be necessary to accommodate the needs of B-Line pedestrians. While the Morton St. space would provide for much more space for the PFVs to set-up, including vehicle parking, at this point, that space seems out of the general flow of the Market and it would be risky to the success of PFVs to make that move – whereas there is almost certainly going to be activity and customer flow on the B-Line plaza. Also, there is no electricity and water available in the Morton St. space (Marcia did preliminarily look in to the possibility of providing these essential PFV resources on Morton St. and it was looking like there would be a significant cost associated, if it was even possible), whereas electricity and water was already installed specifically to accommodate PFV in the B-Line plaza area during construction. Marcia gave the Council an overview of these two options and they agreed the move to the B-Line plaza option would be best. Marcia did mention, though, that it is nice to now know that closing a section of Morton St. to expand the Market is definitely an option, as it is likely the Market will need more space in the near future, especially given the Market's significant growth in the past two years.

Ron shared that he preferred having the PFVs scattered throughout Market as they have been to some extent in the past couple years. Marcia said that while she understood there may be some advantages to that format she thought it best to have them in one or maybe two areas and the 2008 PFVs as well as the Parks Board agreed. Ron also said that it would make sense not to make too many significant changes to the Market at once as it has been very successful, which would also be sensitive to the needs of the Market's older customers, who he said represent a large percentage of the Market customer base. Marcia acknowledged the wisdom in not "fixing something that isn't broken", but said in this situation moving the PFVs (along with several other changes) would open up a significant amount of space within the Market for better customer flow, which has been a serious issue in recent years.

5. Old Business

(A) Review Other Prepared Food Vendor Changes

Marcia provided the Council with copies of a comprehensive list of proposed changes to the Market. The PFV contract specific changes include:

PFVs may request to sell raw or minimally processed agricultural products if they are produced by the primary vendor;

Not allowing franchises;

And incorporating wine vending.

Marcia also asked if any Council members would be willing to serve on the Proposal Review Committee in early February. Linda and Mandy said they definitely would and Teresa and Bruce said they would be available if needed.

(B) Review Other Market Changes

Marcia then went through all the additional changes for 2009, which had already been discussed with the Council in previous meetings.

Site changes:

Closing 8th Street west of B-Line to allow for more space on the west end of the Market area and making it safer for customers traveling to and from the Market north on the B-Line;

Move Info. Alley to 8th St, therefore opening up space in the old Info. Alley area for customer traffic and allowing more space for info. groups;

No busking in the center of the Market, thus opening up the space for better customer traffic flow and access to vendors spaces. Market staff will provide buskers with a map of preferred locations;

Change focus of the circular stage more to north towards brick plaza area, therefore allowing more space for customers gathering to watch performances;

Eliminate early exit from C, D and E11 – E21 for safety reasons as there are quite often a lot of customers in that area throughout Market and in anticipation of the added customer traffic flow from the B-Line plaza entrance to Market. Vendors will be informed that the other early exit spaces near the Morton St. entrance to Market may be eliminated in the near future, therefore preventing vendors from reserving one of those spaces simply because they are still early exit;

Eliminate space C16 to allow for better customer traffic flow around the west end of the C shelter;

And only allowing City/Parks sponsored events in June – September to ease the demand on parking spaces around the Market during the peak season as well as keeping the Market area open for good Market customer traffic flow.

Contract/Handbook Related Changes:

Change definition of primary vendor to include ownership, rental, or leasing of property – as a clarification of the intention of primary vendor status;

Allowing for the sell of plant products that are derived from plants produced/gathered by vendor and have not been crafted (ie. luffas and grapevine wreaths, etc.) Marcia confirmed whether or not Linda thought grapevine wreaths should be included in this category. She did think they belonged;

The possibility of closing Market one hour early on July 4th had been suggested at a previous Council meeting, but after further consideration Marcia, Bradley and the Council members decided it would be best for Market to stay open regular July hours – until 1pm;

Specifying that crafts must be crafted by primary vendor or primary vendor's immediate family or under the direction of the primary vendor in order to be eligible;

Require PFVs to keep same schedule in setting up and removing vehicles from market in October as earlier in the season, allowing for better customer traffic flow in October prior to Market officially opening;

And, using the same system (adjusting for the later Market opening time) for unreserved, day-use space vendors in October as is used May-Sept, therefore allowing those regular unreserved vendors to utilize the same spaces they had been in throughout the season without having to get to Market unreasonably early to claim them.

Info Alley:

No balloons will be allowed to be given away as they regularly get released and then present an environmental hazard.

Monroe County Health Department:

Marcia and Bradley will work with the Incubator Kitchen in establishing an understanding with the MCHD for Value Added Food Products produced by vendors at the kitchen.

(C) Update on Farm Tours

Marcia said the Farm Tour Committee would meet in early January and they would move forward as discussed at the Sept. Advisory Council meeting – organize 3 tours in 2009: a family oriented, casual Spring tour, a more elaborate Summer tour with a nice dinner and a relaxed Fall tour with a soup provided.

(D) Consider Agricultural Award

At the Sept. Advisory Council meeting Linda suggested coordinating an award for a local food hero similar to the award Bloomingfoods organized in 2007. After some consideration Marcia suggested that it might be best for an organization like the Local Growers Guild or Slow Foods to coordinate such an initiative. Linda agreed and said she would present the idea to the Guild. Other Council members thought it made sense to go that route.

6. Adjournment